

The Nuclear Energy World Awaits Trump

Insiders speak about fuel vulnerabilities, proliferation risks, thorium, and the possible costs and benefits of DOGE.

105

49

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The then former U.S. President Donald Trump and Republican presidential nominee, speaks at a campaign rally at McCamish Pavilion in Atlanta, Ga., on Oct. 28, 2024. Anna Moneymaker/Getty Images



America's nuclear energy industry has something special going for it.

“Nuclear energy is one of the few issues that receives bipartisan support across the country,” Maria Korsnick, the president and CEO of the Nuclear Energy Institute, told The Epoch Times in a statement.

Share Democrat-aligned billionaires like Bill Gates have invested heavily in advanced nuclear, as have Republican-aligned billionaires like John Atsimatidis. Meanwhile, sustained, large-scale opposition to nuclear power from the left has mostly dissipated, at least in the United States. Environmentalists increasingly see it as an attractive source of carbon-free baseload power.

Physicist James Walker, CEO of the microreactor firm Nano Nuclear Energy Inc., pointed out that the ADVANCE Act of 2024, key legislation for the deployment of new reactor technologies, was backed by Republicans and Democrats alike. As part of the Fire Grants and Safety Act, it gained overwhelming support from both parties in the House of Representatives, where it [passed](#) 393 to 13, and in the Senate, where it [passed](#) 88 to 2.

A Nov. 12 [policy blueprint](#) from the Biden White House [outlines a plan](#) to triple the country's nuclear energy capacity over the next quarter century.

It certainly appears that the outgoing administration and Democrat-led Senate are pro-nuclear. Yet, with Donald Trump's reelection, “there also might be additional benefit,” Walker told The Epoch Times.

He hopes the new administration will spur domestic production of a fuel used by advanced nuclear reactors. Russia and China dominate the supply chain for that fuel, which is called high-assay, low-enriched uranium (HALEU).

Earlier this year, the U.S. [banned the importation](#) of Russian uranium, with any waivers set to expire by 2028. In October, the Department of

Energy awarded six companies contracts for HALEU production.

“I can’t see, even under the new administration, that relationship being remedied enough that we can go back to sourcing Russian weapons-grade material,” Walker said.

At a Nov. 21 Heritage Foundation roundtable on nuclear energy, Constellation Energy’s David Brown said that American firms involved in producing low-enriched uranium, also supplied by Russia and other countries, have generally set the end of this decade as their launch date, but progress has been slow.

Even amid the bipartisan push for advanced reactors, some scientists and activists worry HALEU is far more easily weaponized than low-enriched uranium, which has become more of a concern recently as the possibility of nuclear war lurches back into public discourse.

“The risk of nuclear war is currently higher than it has been since the Cuban Missile Crisis,” Matthew Bunn, a nuclear and energy policy analyst at the Harvard Kennedy School, told The Epoch Times via email.

“The acute issue is Iran, which is now closer to the edge of a nuclear weapons capability than ever before.”

‘We Need to Revolutionize How We Think’

Trump’s vision includes a new National Energy Council that, in his words, will cover “all forms of American energy” and blaze a trail to American energy dominance. Its prospective members include his pick for energy secretary, fracking innovator Chris Wright. Wright sits on the board of directors of a fission reactor company, Oklo Inc.



Liberty Oilfield Services Inc. CEO Chris Wright on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange on Jan. 12, 2018. Lucas Jackson/Reuters

The council's chair, likely Interior Secretary Doug Burgum, would also be part of the National Security Council.

Trump's planned Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE, will be led in part by businessman Vivek Ramaswamy. During his own presidential run, Ramaswamy called to eradicate the Nuclear Regulatory Commission or NRC.

He [described the agency](#) as “the damper on the revival of nuclear energy in the United States of America.”

Some other insiders have shared similar frustrations with the regulatory status quo.

“We need to revolutionize how we think, how we regulate,” said Jack Spencer, an energy and environmental policy researcher at the Heritage Foundation, during the Nov. 21 nuclear energy roundtable.

Doug Bernauer, the CEO of microreactor startup Radiant Nuclear, objected to the pace of reactor licensing in a Nov. 20 [post](#) on X.

“No new nuclear reactor design has been licensed in over 50 years in the US. ... Will DOGE fix nuclear?” Bernauer wrote.

Mixed Reactions From Industry to DOGE

Some in the nuclear industry have reservations about DOGE.

John Kutsch, the leader of the Thorium Energy Alliance, hopes the administration makes its cuts carefully.

“There’s actual useful things the Department of Energy does,” he told The Epoch Times, citing the agency’s role in nuclear weapons management.

Kutsch believes the closure of the Bureau of Mines during the 1990s was a mistake that ultimately hampered American mining. He said he doesn’t want to see something similar happen again.

“We don’t have critical materials readily available in this country because we can’t open up a mine to save our lives,” he said.

Walker also sounded a note of caution about possible cuts.

“Downsizing something like the NRC might not inherently make it better, because they still will need a lot of people to do a lot of work,” the nuclear industry entrepreneur said.

Walker was cheerier about the prospect of using artificial intelligence to speed up licensing of new reactor designs, at least if such an approach proves technologically feasible.

“You could probably reduce the number of people by an order of magnitude,” he said.

Walker hopes that the administration can develop a better approach to regulating advanced reactors. The current framework, he said, is adapted to the large, light-water reactors currently operating on the U.S. grid.



Nuclear power plant Vogtle Unit 3 and 4 sites are under construction near Waynesboro, Ga., in February 2017. Georgia Power/Handout via Reuters

DoE Destruction of Uranium-233 Worries Thorium Advocates

While Kutsch defended some aspects of the Department of Energy, he's not happy with its approach to uranium-233, a uranium isotope that can be used in thorium-based nuclear energy production.

“This is what gets me mad about bureaucracies,” said Kutsch, whose organization in 2023 signed a memorandum of understanding with El Salvador.

Kirk Sorensen of Flibe Energy, a molten salt reactor company exploring thorium in one of its designs, described uranium-233 as “a marvelous pre-fuel” during the Heritage roundtable with Spencer and Brown.

The Department of Energy has started eliminating the U-233 stored at Oak Ridge National Laboratory.

“Originally created in the 1950s and 1960s for potential use in reactors, U-233 proved to be an unviable fuel source,” the Department of Energy stated in a June post on its disposition project [webpage](#).



An aerial view of the Oak Ridge National Laboratory campus in a file photo. Oak Ridge National Laboratory via The Department of Energy

Sorensen said the department’s U-233 disposition “should be stopped immediately.”

Kutsch said much of that stored U-233 could be used in thorium-based molten salt reactors or in nuclear medicine.

Sen. Tommy Tuberville’s (R-Ala.) proposed [bill](#), the Thorium Energy Security Act of 2022, aimed to facilitate U-233 storage and mandate reports on China’s thorium-based reactor research. It never moved out of committee.

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